

E

433

S512

Seward, William H.

Speech...on the Kansas and
Nebraska bill. ... May 26, 1854.

Washington, 1854



Class E433

Book 5512

SPEECH

OF

WILLIAM H. SEWARD,

ON THE

KANSAS AND NEBRASKA BILL.

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, MAY 26, 1854.

MR. PRESIDENT:

I rise with no purpose of further resisting or even delaying the passage of this bill. Let its advocates have only a little patience, and they will soon reach the attainment of the object for which they have struggled so earnestly and so long. The sun has set for the last time upon the guarantied and certain liberties of all the unsettled and unorganized portions of the American continent that lie within the jurisdiction of the United States. To-morrow's sun will rise in dim eclipse over them. How long that obscurity shall last, is known only to the Power that directs and controls all human events. For myself, I know only this—that no human power can prevent its coming on, and that its passing off will be hastened and secured by others than those now here, and perhaps by only those belonging to future generations.

Sir, it would be almost factious to offer further resistance to this measure here. Indeed, successful resistance was never expected to be made in this Hall. The Senate floor is an old battle ground, on which have been fought many contests, and always, at least since 1820, with fortune adverse to the cause of equal and universal freedom. We were only a few here who engaged in that cause in the beginning of this contest. All that we could hope to do—all that we did hope to do—was to organize and to prepare the issue for the House of Representatives, to which the country would look for its decision as authoritative, and to awaken the country that it might be ready for the appeal which would be made, whatever the decision of Congress might be. We are no stronger now. Only fourteen at the first, it will be fortunate if, among the ills and accidents which surround us, we shall maintain that number to the end.

We are on the eve of the consummation of a great national transaction—a transaction which will close a cycle in the history of our country—and it is impossible not to desire to pause a mo-

ment and survey the scene around us and the prospect before us. However obscure we may individually be, our connection with this great transaction will perpetuate our names for the praise or for the censure of future ages, and perhaps in regions far remote. If, then, we had no other motive for our actions but that of an honest desire for a just fame, we could not be indifferent to that scene and that prospect. But individual interests and ambition sink into insignificance in view of the interests of our country and of mankind. These interests awaken, at least in me, an intense solicitude.

It was said by some, in the beginning, and it has been said by others later in this debate, that it was doubtful whether it would be the cause of Slavery or the cause of Freedom that would gain advantages from the passage of this bill. I do not find it necessary to be censorious, nor even unjust to others, in order that my own course may be approved. I am sure that the honorable Senator from Illinois [Mr. DOUGLAS] did not mean that the slave States should gain an advantage over the free States, for he disclaimed it when he introduced the bill. I believe, in all candor, that the honorable Senator from Georgia, [Mr. TOOMBS,] who comes out at the close of the battle as one of the chiefest leaders of the victorious party, is sincere in declaring his own opinion that the slave States will gain no unjust advantage over the free States, because he disclaims it as a triumph in their behalf. Notwithstanding all this, however, what has occurred here and in the country, during this contest, has compelled a conviction that Slavery will gain something, and Freedom will endure a severe, though I hope not an irretrievable loss. The slaveholding States are passive, quiet, content, and satisfied with the prospective boon, and the free States are excited and alarmed with fearful forebodings and apprehensions. The impatience for the speedy passage of the bill manifested by its friends betrays a knowledge that this is the condition of public

sentiment in the free States. They thought in the beginning that it was necessary to guard the measure by inserting the Clayton amendment, which would exclude unnaturalized foreign inhabitants of the Territories from the right of suffrage. And now they seem willing, with almost perfect unanimity, to relinquish that safeguard, rather than to delay the adoption of the principal measure for at most a year, perhaps for only a week or a day. Suppose that the Senate should adhere to that condition, which so lately was thought so wise and so important—what then? The bill could only go back to the House of Representatives, which must either yield or insist! In the one case or in the other, a decision in favor of the bill would be secured, for even if the House should disagree, the Senate would have time to recede. But the majority will hazard nothing, even on a prospect so certain as this. They will recede at once, without a moment's further struggle, from the condition, and thus secure the passage of this bill now, to-night. Why such haste? Even if the question were to go to the country before a final decision here, what would there be wrong in that? There is no man living who will say that the country anticipated, or that *he* anticipated agitation of this measure in Congress, when this Congress was elected, or even when it assembled in December last.

Under such circumstances, and in the midst of agitation, and excitement, and debates, it is only fair to say that certainly the country has not decided in favor of the bill. The refusal, then, to let the question go to the country, is a conclusive proof that the slave States, as represented here, expect from the passage of this bill what the free States insist that they will lose by it, an advantage, a material advantage, and not a mere abstraction. There are men in the slave States, as in the free States, who insist always too pertinaciously upon mere abstractions. But that is not the policy of the slave States to-day. They are in earnest in seeking for and securing an object, and an important one. I believe they are going to have it. I do not know how long the advantage gained will last, nor how great or comprehensive it will be. Every Senator who agrees with me in opinion must feel as I do—that under such circumstances he can forego nothing that can be done decently, with due respect to difference of opinion, and consistently with the constitutional and settled rules of legislation, to place the true merits of the question before the country. Questions sometimes occur, which seem to have two right sides. Such were the questions that divided the English nation between Pitt and Fox—such the contest between the assailant and the defender of Quebec. The judgment of the world was suspended by its sympathies, and seemed ready to descend in favor of him who should be most gallant in conduct. And so, when both fell with equal chivalry on the same field, the survivors united in raising a common monument to the glorious but rival memories of Wolfe and Montcalm. But this contest involves a moral question. The slave States so present it. They maintain that African slavery is not erroneous, not unjust, not inconsistent with the advancing

cause of human nature. Since they so regard it, I do not expect to see statesmen representing those States indifferent about a vindication of this system by the Congress of the United States. On the other hand, we of the free States regard Slavery as erroneous, unjust, oppressive, and therefore absolutely inconsistent with the principles of the American Constitution and Government. Who will expect us to be indifferent to the decisions of the American people and of mankind on such an issue?

Again: there is suspended on the issue of this contest the political equilibrium between the free and the slave States. It is no ephemeral question, no idle question, whether Slavery shall go on increasing its influence over the central power here, or whether Freedom shall gain the ascendancy. I do not expect to see statesmen of the slave States indifferent on so momentous a question, and as little can it be expected that those of the free States will betray their great cause. And now it remains for me to declare, in view of the decision of this controversy so near at hand, that I have seen nothing and heard nothing during its progress to change the opinions which at the earliest proper period I deliberately expressed. Certainly, I have not seen the evidence then promised, that the free States would acquiesce in the measure. As certainly, too, I may say that I have not seen the fulfillment of the promise that the history of the last thirty years would be revised, corrected, and amended, and that it would then appear that the country, during all that period, had been resting in prosperity and contentment and peace, not upon a valid, constitutional, and irrevocable compromise between the slave States and the free States, but upon an unconstitutional and false, and even infamous, act of Congressional usurpation.

On the contrary, I am now, if possible, more than ever satisfied that, after all this debate, the history of the country will go down to posterity just as it stood before, carrying to them the everlasting facts that until 1820 the Congress of the United States legislated to prevent the introduction of Slavery into new Territories whenever that object was practicable; and that in that year they so far modified that policy, under alarming apprehensions of civil convulsion, by a constitutional enactment in the character of a compact, as to admit Missouri a new slave State; but upon the express condition, stipulated in favor of the free States, that Slavery should be forever prohibited in all the residue of the existing and unorganized Territories of the United States lying north of the parallel of 36° 30' north latitude. Certainly, I find nothing to win my favor toward the bill in the proposition of the Senator from Maryland, [Mr. PEARCE,] to restore the Clayton amendment, which was struck out in the House of Representatives. So far from voting for that proposition, I shall vote against it now, as I did when it was under consideration here before, in accordance with the opinion adopted as early as any political opinions I ever had, and cherished as long, that the right of suffrage is not a mere conventional right, but an inherent

natural right, of which no Government can rightly deprive any adult man who is subject to its authority, and obligated to its support.

I hold, moreover, sir, that inasmuch as every man is, by force of circumstances beyond his own control, a subject of Government somewhere, he is, by the very constitution of human society, entitled to share equally in the conferring of political power on those who wield it, if he is not disqualified by crime; that in a despotic Government he ought to be allowed arms, in a free Government the ballot or the open vote, as a means of self-protection against unendurable oppression. I am not likely, therefore, to restore to this bill an amendment which would deprive it of an important feature imposed upon it by the House of Representatives, and that one, perhaps, the only feature that harmonizes with my own convictions of justice. It is true that the House of Representatives stipulate such suffrage for white men as a condition for opening it to the possible proscription and slavery of the African. I shall separate them. I shall vote for the former, and against the latter, glad to get universal suffrage of white men, if only that can be gained now, and working right on, full of hope and confidence, for the prevention or the abrogation of Slavery in the Territories hereafter.

Sir, I am surprised at the pertinacity with which the honorable Senator from Delaware, mine ancient and honorable friend, [Mr. CLAYTON,] perseveres in opposing the granting of the right of suffrage to the unnaturalized foreigner in the Territories. Congress cannot deny him that right. Here is the third article of that convention by which Louisiana, including Kansas and Nebraska, was ceded to the United States.

"The inhabitants of the ceded territory shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States, and admitted as soon as possible, according to the principles of the Federal Constitution, to the enjoyment of the rights, privileges, and immunities, of citizens of the United States; and in the mean time they shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty, property, and the religion they profess."

The inhabitants of Kansas and Nebraska are citizens already, and by force of this treaty must continue to be, and as such to enjoy the right of suffrage, whatever laws you may make to the contrary. My opinions are well known, to wit: That Slavery is not only an evil, but a local one, injurious and ultimately pernicious to society, wherever it exists, and in conflict with the constitutional principles of society in this country. I am not willing to extend nor to permit the extension of that local evil into regions now free within our empire. I know that there are some who differ from me, and who regard the Constitution of the United States as an instrument which sanctions Slavery as well as Freedom. But if I could admit a proposition so incongruous with the letter and spirit of the Federal Constitution, and the known sentiments of its illustrious founders, and so should conclude that Slavery was national, I must still cherish the opinion that it is an evil; and because it is a national one, I am the more firmly held and bound to prevent an increase of

it, tending, as I think it manifestly does, to the weakening and ultimate overthrow of the Constitution itself, and therefore to the injury of all mankind. I know there have been States which have endured long, and achieved much, which tolerated Slavery; but that was not the slavery of caste, like African Slavery. Such Slavery tends to demoralize equally the subjected race and the superior one. It has been the absence of such Slavery from Europe that has given her nations their superiority over other countries in that hemisphere. Slavery, wherever it exists, begets fear, and fear is the parent of weakness. What is the secret of that eternal, sleepless anxiety in the legislative halls, and even at the firesides, of the slave States, always asking new stipulations, new compromises and abrogation of compromises, new assumptions of power and abnegations of power, but fear? It is the apprehension that, even if safe now, they will not always or long be secure against some invasion or some aggression from the free States. What is the secret of the humiliating part which proud old Spain is acting at this day, trembling between alarms of American intrusion into Cuba on one side, and British dictation on the other, but the fact that she has cherished Slavery so long, and still cherishes it, in the last of her American colonial possessions? Thus far, Kansas and Nebraska are safe, under the laws of 1820, against the introduction of this element of national debility and decline. The bill before us, as we are assured, contains a great principle, a glorious principle; and yet that principle, when fully ascertained, proves to be nothing less than the subversion of that security, not only within the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska, but within all the other present and future new Territories of the United States. Thus it is quite clear that it is not a principle alone that is involved, but that those who crowd this measure with so much zeal and earnestness must expect that either Freedom or Slavery shall gain something by it in those regions. The case, then, stands thus in Kansas and Nebraska: Freedom may lose, but certainly can gain nothing; while Slavery may gain, but as certainly can lose nothing.

So far as I am concerned, the time for looking on the dark side has passed. I feel quite sure that Slavery at most can get nothing more than Kansas; while Nebraska, the wider northern region, will, under existing circumstances, escape, for the reason that its soil and climate are uncongenial with the staples of slave culture—rice, sugar, cotton, and tobacco. Moreover, since the public attention has been so well and so effectually directed toward the subject, I cherish a hope that Slavery may be prevented even from gaining a foothold in Kansas. Congress only gives consent, but it does not and cannot introduce Slavery there. Slavery will be embarrassed by its own over-grasping spirit. No one, I am sure, anticipates the possible re-establishment of the African slave trade. The tide of emigration to Kansas is therefore to be supplied there solely by the domestic fountain of slave production. But Slavery has also other regions besides Kansas to be filled from that fountain. There is all of New

Mexico and all of Utah already within the United States; and then there is Cuba, that consumes slave labor and life as fast as any one of the slaveholding States can supply it; and besides these regions, there remains all of Mexico down to the Isthmus. The stream of slave labor flowing from so small a fountain, and broken into several divergent channels, will not cover so great a field; and it is reasonably to be hoped that the part of it nearest to the North Pole will be the last to be inundated. But African slave emigration is to compete with free emigration of white men, and the source of this latter tide is as ample as the civilization of the two entire continents. The honorable Senator from Delaware mentioned, as if it were a startling fact, that twenty thousand European immigrants arrived in New York in one month. Sir, he has stated the fact with too much moderation. On my return to the capital a day or two ago, I met twelve thousand of these immigrants who had arrived in New York on one morning, and who had thronged the churches on the following Sabbath, to return thanks for deliverance from the perils of the sea, and for their arrival in the land, not of Slavery, but of Liberty. I also thank God for their escape, and for their coming. They are now on their way westward, and the news of the passage of this bill, preceding them, will speed many of them towards Kansas and Nebraska. Such arrivals are not extraordinary—they occur almost every week; and the immigration from Germany, from Great Britain, and from Norway, and from Sweden, during the European war, will rise to six or seven hundred thousand souls in a year. And with this tide is to be mingled one rapidly swelling from Asia and from the islands of the South Seas. All the immigrants, under this bill as the House of Representatives overruling you have ordered, will be good, loyal, Liberty-loving, Slavery-fearing citizens. Come on, then, gentlemen of the slave States. Since there is no escaping your challenge, I accept it in behalf of the cause of Freedom. We will engage in competition for the virgin soil of Kansas, and God give the victory to the side which is stronger in numbers as it is in right.

There are, however, earnest advocates of this bill, who do not expect, and who, I suppose, do not desire, that Slavery shall gain possession of Nebraska. What do they expect to gain? The honorable Senator from Indiana [Mr. PERRIN] says that by thus obliterating the Missouri Compromise restriction, they will gain a *tabula rasa*, on which the inhabitants of Kansas and Nebraska may write whatever they will. This is the great principle of the bill, as he understands it. Well, what gain is there in that? You obliterate a Constitution of Freedom. If they write a new Constitution of Freedom, can the new be better than the old? If they write a Constitution of Slavery, will it not be a worse one? I ask the honorable Senator that! But the honorable Senator says that the people of Nebraska will have the privilege of establishing institutions for themselves. They have now the privilege of establishing free institutions. Is it a privilege, then,

to establish Slavery? If so, what a mockery are all our Constitutions, which prevent the inhabitants from capriciously subverting free institutions and establishing institutions of Slavery? Sir, it is a sophism, a subtlety, to talk of conferring upon a country, already secure in the blessings of Freedom, the power of self-destruction.

What mankind everywhere want, is not the removal of the Constitutions of Freedom which they have, that they may make at their pleasure Constitutions of Slavery or of Freedom, but the privilege of retaining Constitutions of Freedom when they already have them, and the removal of Constitutions of Slavery when they have them, that they may establish Constitutions of Freedom in their place. We hold on tenaciously to all existing Constitutions of Freedom. Who denounces any man for diligently adhering to such Constitutions? Who would dare to denounce any one for disloyalty to our existing Constitutions, if they were Constitutions of Despotism and Slavery? But it is supposed by some that this principle is less important in regard to Kansas and Nebraska than as a general one—a general principle applicable to all other present and future Territories of the United States. Do honorable Senators then indeed suppose they are establishing a principle at all? If so, I think they egregiously err, whether the principle is either good or bad, right or wrong. They are not establishing it, and cannot establish it in this way. You subvert one law capriciously, by making another law in its place. That is all. Will your law have any more weight, authority, solemnity, or binding force on future Congresses, than the first had? You abrogate the law of your predecessors—others will have equal power and equal liberty to abrogate yours. You allow no barriers around the old law, to protect it from abrogation. You erect none around your new law, to stay the hand of future innovators.

On what ground do you expect the new law to stand? If you are candid, you will confess that you rest your assumption on the ground that the free States will never agitate repeal, but always *acquiesce*. It may be that you are right. I am not going to predict the course of the free States. I claim no authority to speak for them, and still less to say what they will do. But I may venture to say, that if they shall not repeal this law, it will not be because they are not strong enough to do it. They have power in the House of Representatives greater than that of the slave States, and when they choose to exercise it, a power greater even here in the Senate. The free States are not dull scholars, even in practical political strategy. When you shall have taught them that a compromise law establishing Freedom can be abrogated, and the Union nevertheless stand, you will have let them into another secret, namely: that a law permitting or establishing Slavery can be repealed, and the Union nevertheless remain firm. If you inquire why they do not stand by their rights and their interests more firmly, I will tell you to the best of my ability. It is because they are conscious of their strength, and, therefore, unsuspecting, and slow to apprehend dan-

ger. The reason why you prevail in so many contests, is because you are in perpetual fear.

There cannot be a convocation of Abolitionists, however impracticable, in Faneuil Hall or the Tabernacle, though it consists of men and women who have separated themselves from all effective political parties, and who have renounced all political agencies, even though they resolve that they will vote for nobody, not even for themselves, to carry out their purposes, and though they practice on that resolution, but you take alarm, and your agitation renders necessary such compromises as those of 1820 and of 1850. We are young in the arts of politics; you are old. We are strong; you are weak. We are, therefore, over-confident, careless, and indifferent; you are vigilant and active. These are all traits that redound to your praise. They are mentioned not in your disparagement. I say only that there may be an extent of intervention, of aggression, on your side, which may induce the North, at some time, either in this or in some future generation, to adopt your tactics and follow your example. Remember now, that by unanimous consent, this new law will be a repealable statute, exposed to all the chances of the Missouri compromise. It stands an infinitely worse chance of endurance than that compromise did.

The Missouri compromise was a transaction which wise, learned, patriotic statesmen agreed to surround and fortify with the principles of a compact for mutual considerations, passed and executed, and therefore, although not irrevocable in fact, yet irrevocable in honor and conscience, and down at least until this very session of the Congress of the United States, it has had the force and authority not merely of an act of Congress, but of a covenant between the free States and the slave States, scarcely less sacred than the Constitution itself. Now, then, who are your contracting parties in the law establishing Governments in Kansas and Nebraska, and abrogating the Missouri compromise? What are the equivalents in this law? What has the North given, and what has the South got back, that makes this a contract? Who pretends that it is anything more than an ordinary act of ordinary legislation? If, then, a law which has all the forms and solemnities recognised by common consent as a compact, and is covered with traditions, cannot stand amid this shuffling of this balance between the free States and the slave States, tell me what chance this new law that you are passing will have?

You are, moreover, setting a precedent which abrogates all compromises. Four years ago, you obtained the consent of a portion of the free States—enough to render the effort at immediate repeal or resistance alike impossible—to what we regarded as an unconstitutional act for the surrender of fugitive slaves. That was declared, by the common consent of the persons acting in the name of the two parties, the slave States and the free States in Congress, an irrevocable law—not even to be questioned, although it violated the Constitution. In establishing this new principle, you expose that law also to the chances of repeal. You not only so expose the fugitive slave law,

but there is no solemnity about the articles for the annexation of Texas to the United States, which does not hang about the Missouri compromise; and when you have shown that the Missouri compromise can be repealed, then the articles for the annexation of Texas are subject to the will and pleasure and the caprice of a temporary majority in Congress. Do you, then, expect that the free States are to observe compacts, and you to be at liberty to break them; that they are to submit to laws and leave them on the statute-book, however unconstitutional and however grievous, and that you are to rest under no such obligation? I think it is not a reasonable expectation. Say, then, who from the North will be bound to admit Kansas, when Kansas shall come in here, if she shall come as a slave State?

The honorable Senator from Georgia, [Mr. TOOMBS,] and I know he is as sincere as he is ardent, says if he shall be here when Kansas comes as a free State, he will vote for her admission. I doubt not that he would; but he will not be here, for the very reason, if there be no other, that he would vote that way. When Oregon or Minnesota shall come here for admission—with in one year, or two years, or three years from this time—we shall then see what your new principle is worth in its obligation upon the slaveholding States. No; you establish no principle, you only abrogate a principle which was established for your own security as well as ours; and while you think you are abnegating and resigning all power and all authority on this subject into the hands of the people of the Territories, you are only getting over a difficulty in settling this question in the organization of two new Territories, by postponing it till they come here to be admitted as States, slave or free.

Sir, in saying that your new principle will not be established by this bill, I reason from obvious, clear, well-settled principles of human nature. Slavery and Freedom are antagonistical elements in this country. The founders of the Constitution framed it with a knowledge of that antagonism, and suffered it to continue, that it might work out its own ends. There is a commercial antagonism, an irreconcilable one, between the systems of free labor and slave labor. They have been at war with each other ever since the Government was established, and that war is to continue forever. The contest, when it ripens between these two antagonistic elements, is to be settled somewhere; it is to be settled in the seat of central power, in the Federal Legislature. The Constitution makes it the duty of the central Government to determine questions as often as they shall arise in favor of one or the other party, and refers the decision of them to the majority of the votes in the two Houses of Congress. It will come back here, then, in spite of all the efforts to escape from it.

This antagonism must end either in a separation of the antagonistic parties—the slaveholding States and the free States—or, secondly, in the complete establishment of the influence of the slave power over the free—or else, on the other hand, in the establishment of the superior influ-

ence of Freedom over the interests of Slavery. It will not be terminated by a voluntary secession of either party. Commercial interests bind the slave States and the free States together in links of gold that are riveted with iron, and they cannot be broken by passion or by ambition. Either party will submit to the ascendancy of the other, rather than yield the commercial advantages of this Union. Political ties bind the Union together—a common necessity, and not merely a common necessity, but the common interests of empire—of such empire as the world has never before seen. The control of the national power is the control of the great Western Continent; and the control of this continent is to be in a very few years the controlling influence in the world. Who is there, North, that hates Slavery so much, or who, South, that hates emancipation so intensely, that he can attempt, with any hope of success, to break a Union thus forged and welded together? I have always heard, with equal pity and disgust, threats of disunion in the free States, and similar threats in the slaveholding States. I know that men may rave in the heat of passion, and under great political excitement; but I know that when it comes to a question whether this Union shall stand, either with Freedom or with Slavery, the masses will uphold it, and it will stand until some inherent vice in its Constitution, not yet disclosed, shall cause its dissolution. Now, entertaining these opinions, there are for me only two alternatives, viz: either to let Slavery gain unlimited sway, or so to exert what little power and influence I may have, as to secure, if I can, the ultimate predominance of Freedom.

In doing this, I do no more than those who believe the Slave Power is rightest, wisest, and best, are doing, and will continue to do, with my free consent, to establish its complete supremacy. If they shall succeed, I still shall be, as I have been, a loyal citizen. If we succeed, I know they will be loyal also, because it will be safest, wisest, and best, for them to be so. The question is one, not of a day, or of a year, but of many years, and, for aught I know, many generations. Like all other great political questions, it will be attended sometimes by excitement, sometimes by passion, and sometimes, perhaps, even by faction; but it is sure to be settled in a constitutional way, without any violent shock to society, or to any of its great interests. It is, moreover, sure to be settled rightly; because it will be settled under the benign influences of Republicanism and Christianity, according to the principles of truth and justice, as ascertained by human reason. In pursuing such a course, it seems to me obviously as wise as it is necessary to save all existing laws and Constitutions which are conservative of Freedom, and to permit, as far as possible, the establishment of no new ones in favor of Slavery; and thus to turn away the thoughts of the States which tolerate Slavery from political efforts to perpetuate what in its nature cannot be perpetual, to the more wise and benign policy of emancipation.

This, in my humble judgment, is the simple, easy path of duty for the American statesman. I

will not contemplate that other alternative—the greater ascendancy of the Slave Power. I believe that if it ever shall come, the voice of Freedom will cease to be heard in these Halls, whatever may be the evils and dangers which Slavery shall produce. I say this without disrespect for Representatives of slave States, and I say it because the rights of petition and of debate on that subject are effectually suppressed—necessarily suppressed—in all the slave States, and because they are not always held in reverence even now, in the two Houses of Congress. When freedom of speech on a subject of such vital interest shall have ceased to exist in Congress, then I shall expect to see Slavery not only luxuriating in all new Territories, but stealthily creeping even into the free States themselves. Believing this, and believing, also, that complete responsibility of the Government to the people is essential to public and private safety, and that decline and ruin are sure to follow, always, on the train of Slavery, I am sure that this will be no longer a land of Freedom and constitutional liberty when Slavery shall have thus become paramount. *Aufere trucidare falsis nominibus imperium atque ubi solitudinem faciet pacem appellant.*

Sir, I have always said that I should not despond, even if this fearful measure should be effected; nor do I now despond. Although, reasoning from my present convictions, I should not have voted for the compromise of 1820, I have labored, in the very spirit of those who established it, to save the landmark of Freedom which it assigned. I have not spoken irreverently, even of the compromise of 1850, which, as all men know, I opposed earnestly and with diligence. Nevertheless, I have always preferred the compromises of the Constitution, and have wanted no others. I feared all others. This was a leading principle of the great statesman of the South, [Mr. CALHOUN.] Said he:

“I see my way in the Constitution; I cannot in a compromise. A compromise is but an act of Congress. It may be overruled at any time. It gives us no security. But the Constitution is a statute. It is a rock on which we can stand, and on which we can meet our friends from the non-slaveholding States. It is a firm and stable ground, on which we can better stand in opposition to fanaticism than on the shifting sands of compromise. Let us be done with compromises. Let us go back and stand upon the Constitution.”

I stood upon this ground in 1850, defending Freedom upon it as Mr. CALHOUN did in defending Slavery. I was overruled then, and I have waited since without proposing to abrogate any compromises.

It has been no proposition of mine to abrogate them now; but the proposition has come from another quarter—from an adverse one. It is about to prevail. The shifting sands of compromise are passing from under my feet, and they are now, without agency of my own, taking hold again on the rock of the Constitution. It shall be no fault of mine if they do not remain firm. This seems to me auspicious of better days and

wiser legislation. Through all the darkness and gloom of the present hour, bright stars are breaking, that inspire me with hope, and excite me to perseverance. They show that the day of compromises has passed forever, and that henceforward all great questions between Freedom and Slavery legitimately coming here—and none other can come—shall be decided, as they ought to be, upon their merits, by a fair exercise of legislative power, and not by bargains of equivocal prudence, if not of doubtful morality.

The House of Representatives has, and it always will have, an increasing majority of members from the free States. On this occasion, that House has not been altogether faithless to the interests of the free States; for although it has taken away the charter of Freedom from Kansas and Nebraska, it has at the same time told this proud body, in language which compels acquiescence, that in submitting the question of its restoration, it would submit it not merely to interested citizens, but to the alien inhabitants of the Territories also. So the great interests of humanity are, after all, thanks to the House of Representatives, and thanks to God, submitted to the voice of human nature.

Sir, I see one more sign of hope. The great support of Slavery in the South has been its alliance with the Democratic party of the North. By means of that alliance it obtained paramount influence in this Government about the year 1800

which, from that time to this, with but few and slight interruptions, it has maintained. While Democracy in the North has thus been supporting Slavery in the South, the people of the North have been learning more profoundly the principles of republicanism and of free government. It is an extraordinary circumstance, which you, sir, the present occupant of the chair, [Mr. STUART,] I am sure will not gainsay, that at this moment, when there seems to be a more complete divergence of the Federal Government in favor of Liberty than ever before, the sentiment of Universal Liberty is stronger in all free States than it ever was before. With that principle the present Democratic party must now come into a closer contest. Their prestige of Democracy is fast waning, by reason of the hard service which their alliance with their slaveholding brethren has imposed upon them. That party perseveres, as indeed it must, by reason of its very constitution, in that service, and thus comes into closer conflict with elements of true Democracy, and for that reason is destined to lose, and is fast losing the power which it has held so firmly and so long. That power will not be restored until the principle established here now shall be reversed, and a Constitution shall be given, not only to Kansas and Nebraska, but also to every other national Territory, which will be not a *tabula rasa*, but a Constitution securing equal, universal, and perpetual Freedom.

7

23

2004

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 011 897 839 0

